

BERLIN CONGRESS FOR FREEDOM

A New Resistance in the Making

FRANCOIS BONDY

IN THE last week of June the Congress for Cultural Freedom convened among the ruins of what had been the capital of the Third Reich. Titania Palace, where the solemn opening meeting was held in the presence of over two thousand invited guests (many had come at great hardship and personal risk from the Eastern zone to hear the message of hope), had once witnessed the oratorical triumphs of Goebbels. The Congress established its office headquarters at the Hotel am Steinplatz, whose roomy cellars had been the scene of much killing and personal violence during the days of the Russian conquest. Perhaps the Congress participants and visitors, by their patronage, helped speed up the hotel's rebuilding and refurbishing, which had of late been proceeding but slowly.

IT WAS the second world congress of intellectuals that I had witnessed, since the war, in the fantastic surroundings of a great and devastated German city. The first was Communist-sponsored and held in the Polonized city of Breslau, now Wroclaw, in No-

vember 1948. The Berlin Congress for Cultural Freedom has been labeled an "anti-Wroclaw," a Western countermove against the repeated attempt to claim for Russia a monopoly of peace, an attempt which was somewhat more successful at Wroclaw than in the later similar tries in Paris, in New York's Waldorf-Astoria, and in Stockholm.

At Wroclaw, the English scientist Julian Huxley, director of UNESCO, had tried hard for a reconciliation between West and East: but though he made a brilliant stand against some of the more fanatical Stalinist speakers, he failed to break through the façade of unity which the Communists had achieved at that time. Huxley's antagonist in the scientific field, the French biologist Marcel Prenant, then a member of the Executive Committee of the French Communist party, has since been silently dropped because he proved unable wholeheartedly to defend the genetics of T. D. Lysenko, and was insufficiently enthusiastic in heaping the proper abuse on all Lysenko's opponents.

Among the writers present I remember the Frenchman Vercors, who has since then timidly defended Tito and questioned the good faith of certain Eastern European hanging trials (thereby becoming a traitor), and the Italian Elio Vittorini. The latter was at the time already a very wavering Communist: after listening to one passionate diatribe against the oppression of the Negro in the United States he whispered into my ear: "Somebody should get up and say that culture is the Negro question of Soviet Russia"; Vittorini has recently left the Communist party. The most famous of Marxist philosophers, Georg Lukacs, was at Wroclaw; he made a violent and abstract speech about the drift toward fascist imperialism in the United States. Since that time, Lukacs has come under continuous and steadily in-

ON JUNE 28, about a hundred and twenty-five outstanding figures in the world of art, science, and thought from America, England, Germany, Western Europe, and countries behind the Iron Curtain, gathered in a Congress for Cultural Freedom in Berlin. The aim of the Congress was to demonstrate to the world the need of unity of all intellectual forces in the face of totalitarianism, and the vital dependence of culture upon freedom and the political institutions which permit and safeguard freedom. FRANCOIS BONDY here presents a full report on the Congress and the issues there discussed. Mr. Bondy is an editor of the Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche*. He has written for many Swiss, French, German, and English periodicals. He was born in Berlin, of Swiss parents, and studied in Swiss and French schools.

creasing attack from the Communists; the official boss of the Russian writers' union, Alexander Fadeyev—who, to the acute embarrassment of the Poles and other Communists, delivered the most aggressive and illiterate harangue at Wroclaw—has now joined this attack, stating: "Lukacs even denies it is possible for the party to direct the creative arts."

Nothing points up more sharply how far the Stalinist realm has narrowed in less than two years than the fact that a Yugoslav delegation was still received, if not exactly welcomed, in Wroclaw, a half a year after the Stalin-Tito break. I recall two of the Yugoslavs, an old frightened professor who insisted that the misunderstanding with the Russians would soon vanish, and a young overconfident Serb who scolded me for not knowing that Jean-Paul Sartre was the leading ideologist of the Gaullist movement in France. At Wroclaw, only the English expressed open disagreement; some of them even drafted a counter-resolution, which they then shelved on the ground that it had been prematurely communicated to the press. They signed the general resolution and then protested afterward in the *New Statesman and Nation* and other English journals where debate on Wroclaw raged for several weeks.

WAS Berlin to be merely an anti-Communist Wroclaw? Some Englishmen apparently thought so. The historian Trevor-Roper signed the general manifesto and then protested afterward in the *Manchester Guardian* against the whole spirit of the Congress, just as the historian A. J. P. Taylor had done at Wroclaw. But to Berlin, Julian Huxley sent a message of encouragement: he no longer believed in any spiritual compromise between free and unfree societies.

In Wroclaw, a coalition between Communists, fellow-travelers, and well-meaning Western pacifists was attempted; in the forming of this strange union, a powerful impetus came from the evidence of a devastated Poland intent on peaceable reconstruction and consolidation of its newly won territories in the West, with many non-Communis-

nists in important cultural positions, with a good deal of freedom of religious and cultural expression (the whole transition from the regime of the suspected Titoist Gomulka to that dominated by the Russian General Rokossovski had only just started).

In Berlin, it was a coalition of intransigent anti-Stalinists (many former Communists among them) and the well-meaning pacifist "third force" intellectuals of Europe that was attempted. Once before, in Paris last year, such an alliance had been launched. But there the third force intellectuals had won control, and turned what was to have been an anti-Stalinist peace demonstration into a meeting that proclaimed a plague on both houses.

The childish performance of that Paris conference was not to be repeated. Only one man now sounded in Berlin the tune of Paris: the Austrian physicist Hans Thirring declared his intention of denouncing the Western "warmongers." The same man—a decent and courageous person—had shortly before, as a rebellious member of the Communist-led peace movement, protested at a Vienna rally against Russian militarism, and withheld his signature from the Stockholm peace appeal. But the very Tuesday on which Professor Thirring was scheduled to deliver his anti-war speech, North Korea launched the invasion of South Korea, whereupon Thirring withdrew his statement (which was nevertheless made available to all the participants and to the press). Ignazio Silone, whose party (Socialist Party of Italian Workers) in Italy is opposed to the Atlantic Pact, and who tried to keep the anti-Communism of the Berlin conference as tolerant, as moderate, and as "third forcist" as possible, protested against Thirring's decision not to read his statement, which—from what I could gather—Silone thought one of the best submitted to the Congress. But in Berlin, the atmosphere of a democratic community resisting, by its own fighting spirit and its solidarity with the free world, an oppression that grips half the city together with its environs a hundred miles to the west, was a powerful agent for unity against totalitarianism.

THE attack on South Korea stole the headlines from the Congress, but at the same time it clarified the issues of peace and war. In this Berlin atmosphere—which Professor Trevor-Roper found full of front-line hysteria and akin to the Nuremberg rallies, but which I, like most participants, found cheerful, stimulating, and free—there could be no break between the more liberal, self-critical wing and the uncompromising group that puts resistance to the Soviet empire above any other present issue. A man like Berlin's Mayor Ernst Reuter, ex-Communist, Social Democrat, and strong partisan of European federation (in opposition to his much more nationalist party chief, Kurt Schumacher), symbolizes, as the air bridge itself does, the unity of these two tasks: the rebuilding of Europe with American help, and the resistance to Stalin, also with American help. The notion of many French and Italian "third forçists" (ranging from Sartre's group to the daily *Le Monde*) that America is dragging Western Europe into its imperial quarrels with Russia appears ridiculous in Berlin. Here, everybody knows that it is Russia, not America, that aims to conquer Europe, and that without the American will to risk war Russia would have achieved this aim long ago. Therefore in this Congress, despite the presence of various trends and of much irritated resistance to the extreme position of Arthur Koestler and James Burnham, no outspoken political opposition was voiced, and even the critical objections raised by papers like the Paris *Le Monde* and the Rome *Il Mondo* merely echoed this general irritation.

The critics of the Congress tended to harp on one point: the Congress had been more political than cultural, a demonstration in the mood of Berlin, of America, of repentant ex-Communists rather than a detached and academic debate on the universal crisis of cultural freedom, and on the dangers and evils besetting our culture from within. This, since the participants knew cultural problems best, and were best equipped to cope with them, should have received the largest measure of attention. An Italian par-

ticipant wrote later: "If the purpose was only to say 'no' to Communism we need not have undertaken the trip, sending a calling card would have done as well."

The irritation of the critics mainly focused on the person of Arthur Koestler. A congress of intellectuals is among other things a meeting of prima donnas; and Koestler, who obviously enjoyed speaking to large crowds in a low deep voice, who likes a good polemical fight, and who, besides, was the most active influence in the Congress, certainly stole the show. I myself can well understand how he created irritation and resentment, but actually the reproaches hurled at him were self-contradictory. He was attacked for saying too little and too much, for oversimplifying the issue, and injecting too many new ideas into the debate.

His first short speech was delivered in Titania Palace, as the final speech of the opening meeting. Preceding him, Silone had spoken movingly about those areas of cultural oppression which the UNESCO investigation had been forced to ignore because UNESCO had to work through the very states that were responsible for the oppression. He proposed that the Congress promote a continuation of the UNESCO inquiry by private means, in order to reveal the plight of the artist in the totalitarian state, while at the same time not forgetting his plight and his difficulties in the freer states as well. Then eighty-four-year-old Professor Alfred Weber of Heidelberg held his German audience spellbound in a speech lasting forty-five minutes and full of intricate grammatical construction, which denounced the evil inheritance of the Bismarck tradition and ended with a "*mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*." The vitality and intellectual courage of this speech were unquestionable. But Koestler's speech about "two methods of action" was the decisive political event of the opening session; it set the mood, centered the discussions, and created that communion between the Congress participants and the Berlin audience which some people later took exception to, but which at the time gave everybody the sense of a historic occa-

sion—I myself felt it, and do not hesitate now to recall it. There are situations—Koestler said—in which an unambiguous decision is vital for spiritual and physical survival, and on such occasions only the teaching of Matthew, “Let your word be, Yea, Yea, Nay, Nay,” is relevant and the differentiating “neither-nor” attitude becomes suicidal.

THE next time Koestler spoke, in the fourth panel discussion on the question of peace, he was not so simple or impressive. His subject was “the false dilemma,” and he stated that the old issue of capitalism versus socialism which had divided the members of free societies is not being resolved, but receding into the background as many other issues had before (Catholicism versus Protestantism, for instance), and that the real issue of our time is: total tyranny versus relative freedom. His remarks about the fetishist power of words, especially of the word “left,” provoked immediate rebuttal and controversy. The British Labor movement was unfortunately not represented (Crossman and the other M.P.’s who were expected had to postpone their trip at the last moment because of a debate on the Schuman plan), but the Norwegian Socialist Haakon Lie and the French Socialist André Philip, especially the former, defended socialism against Koestler’s attack, which had taken the line that labor movements were by no means more internationalist than those that opposed them, and in the case of England even less so.

At the same meeting, James Burnham also provoked some indignation when he said bluntly that he was opposed to abstract denunciations of nuclear arms, and that the atomic bomb in the possession of America was a help to freedom whereas the atomic bombs which may now exist somewhere in Siberia were a deadly menace to freedom. André Philip protested that Europe did not want to experience either the “good” or the “bad” atomic bombs and could not afford to look to a costly if eventual victory but only to the preservation of peace.

Another Frenchman, David Rousset—famous for his books on the world of the con-

centration camps and his campaign for an international inquiry on the Soviet slave camps—also resented the too warlike tone of the debate, and was especially repelled by Franz Borkenau’s impassioned speech hailing the American intervention in Korea. The tremendous ovation which Borkenau’s provocative speech drew from the Berlin public shocked many French, Italian, and English visitors. Indeed the speech tended to transform—rather unfortunately—a discussion meeting into a mass meeting; yet the over-excited contribution of Professor Borkenau shocked some of his hearers perhaps not so much by its lack of tact as by its essential truth. The greater part of the Western European liberal and socialist intellectuals who were present wanted to give an answer to the Communist-inspired peace partisans (whom Berlin Mayor Ernst Reuter, when asked officially to join them, aptly called “the one real menace to world peace”), but they did not relish being confronted with a situation in which the issues of freedom and of peace are in conflict. Not only aggression, but also resistance, is an act of war, and there is—and has always been—a point at which the choice between freedom and peace has to be made.

AT THIS point in the discussion, it appeared that the two main ideological tendencies of the Congress followed along geographical lines. Western Europe’s intellectuals spoke of fighting Communism through social justice and prosperity, through a European federation and the elimination of nationalism, and, generally, by creating a better society within the last fringe of the continent that is still comparatively free to mold its own destiny. On the other side, Berlin, the Americans, and the refugees from Russia and Eastern Europe (who should have numbered more but were, anyway, fairly represented), on the whole expressed the idea that freedom cannot live on self-criticism and guilt, or even by constructing social paradises.

For them, freedom had another task. It must take the political offensive, encourage the oppressed peoples enslaved within the largest and most tyrannical empire in history,

it must encourage especially their intellectuals, help them actively, never lose sight of their fate—in a word, it must make no compromise with the Iron Curtain and Stalinist oppression. As a moral issue, agitation for freedom cannot stop at any arbitrary frontier (what could be more arbitrary than the frontier that cuts Berlin in two?): Budapest, Warsaw, Prague are still European capitals, to quote Carlo Schmid, vice-president of the West German parliament. But beyond the moral issue stands the practical political issue: to remain passive before the consolidation of Soviet power in Europe means to face an even more rapid militarization of the satellites, and soon a "Korean situation" if not worse. Already in Eastern Germany, the Russian and German Communists have succeeded in fanaticizing and militarizing the youth to a much greater extent than is commonly realized, while—despite the Mantouffell plan and other rumored attempts—nothing like this is happening in Western Germany. Not to challenge Russia while she builds her North Korean armies in half of Europe would be suicidal; for certainly we cannot expect from Russia the reciprocal courtesy of keeping hands off the Western democracies.

These were the two tendencies present. The dispute that broke out the very last day around the final "manifesto," which dealt with the degree of tolerance to be granted to Communists as an apparatus and an ideology, failed to blur the main issue and the real alternative: how work for peace? Peace through a Western and, especially, European unity which would confront Russian expansion not with another disrupted South Korea but with self-reliant, healthy communities—or peace through a continuous political and intellectual offensive, weakening Russia's hold over the masses everywhere, and especially directed at the subjects within its own empire? This was the real subject of the Berlin conference.

THERE could not have been a more impassioned, more timely theme in a more dramatic setting. Yet the title "Congress

for Cultural Freedom" hardly conveys it, and it might better have been called "A Congress for Freedom in Berlin." The impact of the totalitarian state on culture, literature, and science was, of course, also debated at this Congress. The communications of the German biologist Professor Hans Nachtsheim and of the American biologist Hermann J. Muller, former head of the Moscow Institute of Genetics, were interesting and in order, as was the searching critique to which two Germans, Eugen Kogon and Dolf Sternberger, subjected the notion of a "culture" remaining above social and political obligations and apart from "civilization"; and I trust the editor will permit me to say that Elliot E. Cohen's paper on the free citizen in America was widely discussed among Berlin students and quoted—in contrast to Giuseppe Borgese's rather pessimistic statement on culture in the democracies—for its healthy tone of American self-assertion. It displayed an attitude of mind which the intellectuals of the democracies, afflicted with guilt complexes, are rather overcareful to avoid.

But the definition of freedom, and the discussion about the place of culture in society, remained secondary; the Congress was primarily, just as Wroclaw was, a *political* event. It should have been, and should be, criticized or approved as such. What critical reaction did appear in the European press failed to come out with open opposition to its political content. The critics did not like the politics of the Congress, thought them too "extreme," but instead of discussing the why and wherefore, they chose rather to quarrel with the fact that there was not enough "pure culture," and that there were too many ex-Communists.

A cultural or even religious debate on the meaning of freedom might of course have taken place as well. There might have been some lively, if inconclusive, debate between Christopher Hollis, who believes that the Communist challenge can be met only on the religious plane, and Trevor-Roper and A. J. Ayer, who maintain that the Christian churches were as totalitarian in their heyday as Communism is today. But the Berlin Con-

gress discussed the issue of freedom in actual political, not historical, terms, in relation to Stalin's empire, not to Calvin or Loyola. It also discussed Franco Spain (the strange case of Tito was skipped, maybe for lack of time) and condemned his regime as strongly as it did Stalinism. This was necessary, considering the mood of most of the participants—the new anti-Communists are all old anti-fascists. But when in the end Franco Spain was defined as "totalitarian" in the same sense as the Eastern European regimes, the Congress lost the philosophical distinction that it had tried to establish between old and new tyrannies, between authoritarian and totalitarian governments.

Silone was right when at the final mass meeting—it was held in the open in the "Sommergarten" before many thousands of Berliners who drank beer at little tables and appeared interested but not overly excited—he said in the shortest and most welcome speech of that day: "We were men of the Resistance, we have come together to form a new Resistance." Together, his first speech, which had proposed an enlarged UNESCO inquiry (the Congress accepted the suggestion), and this last speech, which was a pledge to action, gave clear evidence that in Berlin activism had triumphed over dialectic.

THE Congress had, it must be recalled, been conceived in a spontaneous communion of thought of several participants in a "congress for culture" held the previous November in the calm and idyllic city of Lausanne—Melvin Lasky, editor of *Der Monat*, David Rousset, and Carlo Schmid were three of the people involved; Lasky, as secretary general, was the active promoter in Berlin, together with Mayor Reuter. It was the urge to bring culture and the problems of liberty out of the academic surroundings of a Swiss city into the ruins of a beleaguered island inside the Soviet empire in Europe that gave birth to the Congress. Activism and intense political conviction were at its cradle, nurtured it, gave it significance.

We may say that actually three things were present to every mind at this Berlin meeting—they were nothing less than *truth, freedom, peace*. Truth—because in the face of propaganda, which is the weapon of the totalitarians, our side can afford the truth, and has it as an ally (I was especially pleased to hear James Burnham, the "Machiavelian," make this statement, pledging politics to moral values as he never has in his books). The German philosopher Karl Jaspers (in a written communication to the Congress) pointed out that the truth needs active propaganda just as much as falsehood does—even the innocent man needs a good lawyer. A discussion of the principles that underlie the search for truth was the main contribution of Sidney Hook to the Congress. In fact, the issue of values was never obscured at the Congress by political "activism."

As to freedom—here the contribution of the exiles, of those who know freedom by having lived through its loss, was, in my opinion, the most significant. Joseph Czapski, the Polish writer, said rightly: "I do not believe in the will to fight for freedom of intellectuals who are indifferent to the systematic liquidation of all free and young minds in one half of Europe." A young Russian emigré, Sergey Utechin, outlined in his paper a sociology of the Soviet Union and discussed the fascinating question as to how far "the disguise of one's real feelings" has become the one great means of spiritual integrity for a Russian citizen. In the remarks of the "new emigrés" from Russia there was the sense of a new experience, a conviction, which I have never met up with before, that totalitarianism might find itself suddenly helpless. This might appear to be a piece of mysticism, and it was linked to the doctrine of "solidarism" and the thought of Dostoevsky and Berdyaev in a way which I found confusing, but the authority of real life experience radiated from these young Russians. To have brought together not only Europeans and Americans into a common political league but at the same time old and new Russian emigrés, from Boris Nicolaevski to Utechin, Andreyev, and the others,

to have expanded the reach of human as well as political bonds, was in itself a remarkable feat in a meeting of this kind, and one I have never seen achieved before.

The Russians attested that the same forces for freedom that are at work inside the Western states are also at work within Eastern Europe. One of them went so far as to assert that in Russia itself, right now, there exist strong spiritual "antidotes" for totalitarianism, and that one day the West would be forced to take a lesson from these. By contrast, Richard Loewenthal, in a penetrating theoretical analysis, stated that the West had kept the capacity for genuine free development which Russia through a historical miscarriage had lost. But, he added, the third force could not claim to represent this internal development of the West—the third force does not originate in self-reliance, as it pretends, but in weakness and fear; third force isolationism is the basis for a new Pétainism, and only Western unity can be the basis for a moral counteroffensive.

THEREBY the question of freedom led again to that of peace and war. Here a written communication of the French writer Raymond Aron was of particular importance. In it he analyzed pacifism as a possible cause of war and—coming very close to Burnham's thesis—denied that peace and war can any longer be radically different, clearly delimited phenomena. The pretension of the Soviet rulers to a monopoly of truth—wrote Aron—creates in itself a latent state of war which is imposed on the other societies, who are left powerless to decide whether a "dialogue" with Soviet Russia is or is not possible. No amount of intellectual agility, Aron further said, can evade the issue: resistance or capitulation.

Many of the papers submitted to the Congress will soon appear in magazines and

books, and need not be quoted here at any length. Needless to say, the participants of the Congress and those who came to listen could not in that one week digest all the thinking and discussion, or read more than a small part of the material circulated. In the wake of the Congress a number of forums were organized (on Germans and Jews,* on Adolf Hitler and his Reich, on the crisis of European literature—this one attracted a large attendance from among students—on the Negro question, etc.). A week was too short in which to debate the fundamental questions and Berlin was an accidental arena. But as a source of encouragement to the outpost of Berlin, and of great personal enrichment to those who were present—the rally was a success.

Yet the Congress for Cultural Freedom aims to be more than that, more than a demonstration. It proposes to become a permanent organization, to realize its pledges of action and of resistance, to fulfill the many tasks envisaged (scholarships for Eastern European students, cheap books for Germans, etc.). A "League of Freedom" among intellectuals of America, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe is now emerging from the Berlin meeting. Its first interest will obviously be Europe; its main seats, Berlin and Paris. To the false alliance between Communists and pacifists—which is more and more based on domination and fear—it will oppose the alliance of those who put truth, freedom, and human dignity above everything, even above peace, and who for that very reason can be counted upon to play their part in arousing and bringing together those forces whose unity and determination can maintain or, rather, create peace.

*The text of the address given by Elliot E. Cohen at this session may be found on pp. 225 ff. in this issue.